were probably an Indo-European people, speaking an Iranian dialect, and unrelated racially to the Hsiung Nu. Migrating westward into what is now Hi and later still farther westward and then southward, for some.centuries they ruled the territory north of the Oxus, and in Bactria (in the trans-Caspian region, north and east of Persia) overthrew the kingdoms established by Greek adventurers in the wake of the armies of Alexander the Great. Later some of them invaded Northwest India and in the early part of the Christian era, under the Kushan dynasty, experienced important cultural developments. It was a mark of statesmanship on the part of Wu Ti that he attempted to form an alliance with them against their common enemy, the Hsiung Nu. The envoy whom he chose to effect this purpose was Chang Ch'ien—who seems, indeed, to have suggested the plan.

Around the name of Chang Ch'ien many later accretions of legend and fabrication have gathered. Even the standard accounts have been declared by some scholars either to be interpolations or to contain many later additions. Back of them must, however, lie at least a basis of fact. The record as we have it can be summarized as follows. In B.C. 138 Chang Ch'ien left China on his westward journey. The Hsiung Nu captured him and for ten years held him prisoner. Escaping, he reached the Yiieh Chih in Bactria and spent a year among them. The Yiieh Chih declined the proffered alliance, but Chang Ch'ien had brought the Chinese in touch with the West and had reached the outposts of the cultural influences of the Mediterranean world. The intrepid traveller succeeded in making his way back to China

(B.C. 126).

While in Bactria, Chang Ch'ien found bamboo and cloth which he believed—possibly incorrectly—to have originated in what are now Szechwan and Yunnan. He learned that these were said to come through India and that they had reached that country by way of what is now the Yunnan-Burmese border. This led him to dream of opening communication between China and the West by that route instead of by the one which the Hsiung Nu had made so difficult for him. However, he found this impracticable.

A few years later Chang Ch'ien went on another embassy to the West. This time he himself did not go so far as on his first journey, but sent subordinates on the more distant missions.